

PROCESS FOR PRODUCING AN ELECTRODE AND USE OF THE ELECTRODE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a process for producing an impermeable or substantially impermeable electrode, for example, electrolytic capacitors, supercapacitors or batteries.

It is known in the field of electrolytic capacitors to use metal foils as cathodes. Therein the metal foils are etched chemically or electrochemically. The etching penetrates into the material body of the metal foil whereby the surface and, thus, the specific capacitance, of the foil is increased. Due to the etching, the electric resistance, for example of an aluminum foil, in comparison to a non-etched foil, is increased by a factor which is a function of the quantity of the metal removed during the etching process. In addition, the metal foil loses mechanical strength. The natural oxidation which takes place with this treatment yields a capacitance which is a function of the dielectric constant of the metal itself and the treatment performed on the metal foil.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In contrast, according to the present invention the desired capacitance is attained through the deposition of graphite. In this way neither the electric resistance nor the mechanical strength of the metal foil are impaired.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

More specifically, the present invention provides a process for producing an impermeable or substantially impermeable electrode suitable for use in an electrolytic capacitor or battery,

which comprises immersing a substrate in a suspension comprising graphite in an organic solvent in a concentration of graphite of 1 to 50 g/l to deposit a layer of graphite on the substrate, removing the substrate with graphite layer thereon from the suspension, drying the substrate with graphite layer thereon at approximately 80 to 150°C, and heat-treating the dried substrate with graphite layer thereon at 200 to 450°C to form an impermeable or substantially impermeable conductive layer of graphite on the substrate.

The invention provides in particular a simple and effective process for producing an electrode for electrolytic capacitors, supercapacitors or batteries with an impermeable conducting layer of graphite, which is deposited from a suspension comprising graphite at a concentration between 1 and 50 g/l in an organic solvent onto a substrate by immersion for a given length of time of, for example, approximately 10 to 60 seconds, wherein, after the deposition, the substrate with the layer comprising graphite is dried at a temperature between 80 and 150 °C for a given length of time of, for example, approximately 1 minute and, after the drying, is heat-treated at a temperature between approximately 200 and 450 °C for a given length of time, for example, approximately 5 to 60 minutes.

The organic solvent which serves as a vehicle for the graphite during the layer formation is eliminated during the drying. In the final heat treatment at increased temperatures a compact impermeable deposition layer of graphite is obtained, which covers the substrate and adheres to it. The selection of the temperature and length of the heat treatment determines the quality of the compactness and of the adhesive strength of the layer.

If the capacitance of such an electrode is measured in a solution of ammonium adipate with a resistance of 15 Ω .cm and a pH value of 6.6, considerable capacitance values between

100 μF and 5000 μF are obtained.

If, for example, an etched cathode foil having a thickness of 50 μm (length of the substrate: 100 cm; width of the substrate: 4 cm), such as is conventionally used in capacitor technology, is compared in the usual manner with a corresponding foil of 30 μm thickness, on which a layer of graphite has been deposited according to the invention, the results in Table 1 are obtained:

Table 1

Foil thickness	Technology	Electric resistance	Capacitance $\mu\text{F}/\text{cm}^2$	Mechanical strength
30 μm	produced according to the invention	30 m Ω	1000	35 N/cm
50 μm	conventionally etched	33 m Ω	440	30 N/cm

It is evident that with the process according to the invention significantly higher capacitance values with considerably lesser foil thickness can be attained, and specifically at lower electric resistance and higher mechanical strength. Electrodes according to the invention are therefore far superior to conventional etched foils. Due to the lower material strength of the electrodes according to the invention it is possible, for example when they are used as a cathode in an electrolytic capacitor, to achieve significantly higher capacitance values at identical volume.

The following Table 2 shows the characteristic capacitance behavior with respect to the frequency of an electrode (approximately 20 cm^2) according to the invention in comparison to a cathode etched in the conventional manner.

Table 2

Frequency (Hz)	Electrode produced according to to the invention μF	Conventionally etched cathode μF
10	80000	4400
20	40000	4000
50	18000	3600
100	9600	3400
1000	1100	2500
10000	50	1010

It is evident that electrodes according to the invention assume considerably higher capacitance values at low frequencies below approximately 300 Hz. Capacitors equipped with electrodes according to the invention are therefore preferably suitable for energy storage.

The substrate for the electrode according to the invention on which the graphite is deposited, is preferably a metal foil, for example comprising aluminum, or an insulating foil comprising a synthetic material. When using a metal foil, the layer of graphite behaves like a short circuit and prevents any change in the ohmic resistance of the substrate. If the substrate is insulating, the graphite layer represents a minimum electric resistance. The metal foil can remain untreated before the deposition of the graphite, however, it is preferably chemically or electrochemically pickled and/or treated with mechanical surface treatment, such as brushing, in order to further improve the efficiency of the electrode produced according to the invention.

The layer of graphite can be deposited on one side or on both sides of the substrate.

The organic solvent for the graphite suspension is, for example, an alcohol, a mixture of alcohols or a solvent having a carbonyl group.

The heating of the layer of graphite should preferably take place in a controlled atmosphere or in an inert gas atmosphere such as a nitrogen or argon atmosphere.

The substrate for the deposition of the graphite preferably has a thickness between approximately 15 and 55 μm .

The invention is also directed to the use of an electrode produced according to the previously described process. The use takes place, as already mentioned, preferably as a cathode of an electrolytic capacitor for very low frequencies, which has an anode supporting an oxide layer with dielectric properties, for example as an electrode of a supercapacitor operating according to the principle of the Helmotz double layer and a diffusion layer.

The electrode produced according to the invention can also be used as the negative electrode of a battery.

When using the electrode in a graphite battery with a graphite block and a negative case, a metal foil serves as the substrate, both sides of the substrate are covered with a layer of graphite, and a contact between the graphite block and the negative case is established.

When using an electrode according to the invention as the electrode of a lithium battery, the substrate is a metal foil which is placed between the separators and is connected with the negative battery case.